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Loring. An Oration, Boston, July 4, 1821.

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AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1821,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN OF BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

THE ANNIVERSARY

OF

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

BY

CHARLES G. LORING.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE TOWN OF BOSTON.

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY CHARLES CALLENDER,

No. 25, School-Street.

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1821.

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Copy of

Mrs. F. L. Bay

VOTE OF THE TOWN OF BOSTON.

Boston, 4th of July, 1821.

VOTED, That the Selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a Committee to wait on CHARLES G. LORING, Esq. in the name of the town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited Oration, this day delivered by him at the request of the town, upon the Anniversary of American Independence, in which were considered the feelings, manners, and principles, which produced the great national event, and the important and happy effects, general and domestic, which have already, or will forever flow from that auspicious epoch ; and to request of him a copy for the press.

ATTEST.

THOMAS CLARK, *Town-Clerk.*

ORATION.

THE political situation of the world renders the celebration of this anniversary of our independence peculiarly interesting to us as citizens, and as freemen who feel that the cause of humanity and civil liberty is every where the same, and every where our own. At no period, since our revolution, have the advantages of our civil institutions and the principles of republican government enjoyed a triumph so brilliant, as now arises from contrasting the condition of the people of the United States of America with that of any other on the globe.

While one nation is struggling with convulsive energy to free itself from the grasp of despotism, and another overwhelmed in crime and bloodshed, is alternately the victim of anarchy and oppression ; while one is trembling beneath an uncertain and hazardous form of government, and in another, the balance of power between the crown and the people is avowedly maintained by corruption ; while in all, hereditary and arbitrary distinctions, alike derogatory to human nature and destructive of public

morals, are perpetual sources of injustice, jealousy and discord ; and a varying contest is continually raging between subjects and rulers : we are enjoying, in tranquillity and security, the exercise of every civil and religious privilege. While other nations are kept in slavish ignorance of their rights and their strength, we boast a liberty of the press requiring no other censorship than the purity of public morals, and the enlightened strength of public opinion ; and while a fearful combination has been formed by the monarchs of Europe to perpetuate the slavery of their subjects, and protect their mutual usurpations against the encroachments of increasing intelligence, our government, respected abroad and revered at home, alone stands firm upon the principles and affections of its citizens, unshaken amid the tempests that agitate the world.

These peculiarities in our national situation are not referred to, merely as subjects of pride and exultation ; we have, indeed, great cause to exult, and the commemoration of this day should excite lofty and joyous feelings ; but our privileges are of a nature too solemn and important to constitute themes of ostentatious declamation ; they should not be contemplated but with deep emotions of gratitude, and a corresponding sense of the duties they impose.

Were we inclined to make this an occasion of national boasting, themes would not be wanting ; no other people can trace so heroic and enlightened an ancestry ; none can boast so unsullied an history, or a more brilliant register of statesmen and patriots : our annals are unstained with records of wars of ambition or usurpation, of public crimes and massacres ; and the heroes whom

we delight to honour, would claim no wreaths but those which Liberty, rather than Victory, should bind around their brows.

This day should not pass without a tribute of veneration and gratitude to the illustrious men who achieved our Independence, and of honour to those who have since so nobly maintained our national reputation : but, proud as we are of the military and naval fame of our country, we should do injustice to the memory of the dead, did we suppose they would rather be commemorated as panders of national vanity, than as defenders of our freedom ; and should offend the patriotism of the living, did we think they would rather listen to panegyrics of their own exploits, than unite in the common cause of celebrating our national liberty and happiness.

Let other nations celebrate their jubilees by declamatory boastings of their national greatness and military and naval renown ; let their citizens be fascinated with the imagination of their glory ; they have little else to exult in : the sober realities of their condition would afford scanty cause for rejoicing : but let us celebrate this birth-day of our Independence as freemen, with a joyous and dignified estimation of our civil and religious privileges, and with an impressive sense of our obligation to transmit them unimpaired to posterity.

To develope the PRINCIPLES, FEELINGS and MANNERS of our fathers, would require a recurrence to their history from the introduction of the Reformation into England, a period

peculiarly illustrative of the revolutions necessarily occasioned by the developement of mind. Liberty of Conscience, as it is the most obvious and forcible of human rights, was the first attainment of man emerging from the slavery in which during the dark ages he was enthralled ; and religious toleration once secured, political freedom, with which it is essentially connected, soon followed.

These principles and feelings are founded in that instinctive love of freedom which God has constituted an element of the human soul ; which, under the influence of increasing intelligence, is now exciting the nations of Europe to throw off the chains they have so long ignobly worn ; and which, we trust in Heaven, will lead them gradually to abolish those institutions which have been for ages the scourge and degradation of our race. They are the same principles, which, in their origin, produced the glorious revolution of 1688, of which Englishmen so proudly and so justly boast ; the same which have excited and upheld them in the gradual suppression of arbitrary power, and the establishment of that system of civil liberty and security that now raises them so high above every nation in Europe ; and which, we doubt not, would have aroused them to a fearless and unyielding resistance of their own government, had it attempted to impose upon them the lawless authority with which it endeavoured to shackle these colonies.

Brought by our fathers into this wilderness of Liberty,—and left to work their own way to perfection,—with no prejudices to warp, no arbitrary power to resist, and no

antiquated institutions to crush their growth, these principles gradually expanded, under the influence of education and religion, into that system of civil and religious freedom and well-tempered political equality, on which has been erected the noblest temple of liberty the world has ever seen.

The situation of our ancestors was peculiarly calculated to strengthen and confirm these principles and to produce corresponding feelings and manners :—The difficulties and dangers of their undertaking, the poverty of their soil and hardships of their condition, were conducive to the establishment of the freedom we now commemorate ; had a fertile land rewarded their industry, or golden treasures been the fruit of their enterprise, the protection and assistance of the mother-country would have been early extended over them ; and, with her fostering care, would have been blended the gradual introduction of the abuses as well as the advantages of her civil institutions, and the firm establishment of her maternal authority. But, thanks to the sterility of the country, the horrors of the climate, the terrors of the wilderness and dread of its savage inhabitants, our fathers were left to protect and defend themselves ; till habits of self-government, a proud sense of personal independence, and that political equality necessarily created by a community of hardships and calamities, had become interwoven with all their principles and feelings ; till they became too fond of their freedom and too conscious of their strength, “to bear a yoke they were able to break.”

We may trace the influence of these principles, feelings and manners throughout their whole history ;

we behold it, in their establishment of a representative assembly so soon after their emigration, though their charter contained no such privilege ; in their firm and manly reply to the order in council for the surrender of their charter in 1638 ; in their fearless opposition to the commissioners of Charles the Second ; and in their persevering refusals to conform to the royal instructions in 1720, to establish a permanent salary for the chief magistrate, who would thereby have been rendered independent of the people he was appointed to govern ; we trace it in all the various intermediate oppositions to encroachments upon their charter ; in their spirited remonstrances and resistance against the various navigation acts, writs of assistance, and other engines of arbitrary power :—and at last, when every appeal to justice, to honour and to mercy, had failed them, and when further obedience became a dereliction of their principles and a sacrifice of their freedom, we behold our fathers retreating to these principles, as the rock of their safety, throw off the allegiance to which, till then, they had so faithfully adhered, and defend by force, the rights they could no longer peaceably enjoy. Theirs were principles, feelings and manners, which, it required not the spirit of prophecy to foretell, would soon cause them to acknowledge no other government than that erected by themselves, and the exercise of no authority independent of their own ; and strange indeed was the infatuation that led the government of Great-Britain to suppose that our fathers would yield those rights, which they had been taught to hold as conditions of existence.

Our revolution was of a nature altogether peculiar ; it was not the effect of internal dissensions and domestic

discord ; it was not a contest between subjects and rulers, in which the feelings and principles of one portion of the citizens were arrayed in hostility against those of another ; it was rather a contest for national than individual rights ; rather resistance to foreign aggression than revolt against abused authority. It terminated in the peaceable establishment of a free government, because it was effected by an enlightened people, acting in reference to rights well ascertained and understood ; by men who were able to appreciate and adjust that compromise of individual, for the sake of social liberty, which is the last acquisition of man in a state of society, and which an educated people can alone acquire or retain.

The study of our country's history is not only interesting from the grandeur and variety of the events and the heroism of the achievements it records, but is essential to a right understanding of our civil institutions, and of the only means of preserving them. In that of no other people are the grand principles of political equality, and of government's being founded on the consent of the people, to be administered solely for their benefit, completely developed ; or those of private and public justice, of religion and morality, so amply illustrated ; almost every page breathes forth their feelings, displayed in an ardent love of liberty, a fervent patriotism, a zealous attachment to their civil and religious institutions and a generous regard for the welfare of posterity : and almost every event is illustrative of the simplicity, moderation and energy of their manners.

It is a subject of great congratulation, that we can, this day, record an event in the history of our Commonwealth,

which assures us that the influence of the principles, feelings and manners of our fathers is yet with their children. The proceedings and result of the convention lately assembled for the revisal of our constitution, afford convincing proof of the stability of a government, which they so impressively proclaim to be founded in the affections and confidence of its citizens.—Let the advocate of the degrading maxim, that man is incapable of self-government, contemplate the scene of moral grandeur which this event unfolds ; let him behold the reverence and affection with which the numerous delegates of a free people approach the institutions of their ancestors, to effect those alterations which a change of political situation had rendered essential ; let him observe the impressive sense of responsibility, the unity of design, the solemn earnestness, which pervade their deliberations : the dignified and manly deference with which prejudices and preconceived opinions are yielded to the force of truth and reason ; and the feelings which prompt a voluntary and simultaneous homage to that revered patriot, who happily remains to see, in the pride of its strength, the temple he assisted to raise ; let him view, in the result of their labours, a confirmation of all the essential principles of our constitution : and following them to their homes, let him see them diffusing an increased love and veneration for the institutions of our country, without carrying with them one feeling of party animosity or local jealousy to disturb the tranquillity of the republic ; let him look still further, and contemplate the submission of the recommendations of these delegates to the decision of their constituents, and, instead of the eagerness for change characteristic of every other than a free people, let him view our fellow citizens, rejecting most of the proposed amendments, clinging with fond venera-

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tion to the institutions of their fathers, scarce willing to touch, even with a sparing hand, the edifice in which they had so happily and securely dwelt :—and then, let him renounce a doctrine so insulting to our race and to God.

Our thoughts naturally turn from reflecting upon the tranquillity and security of our own country, to a contemplation of the peculiarly interesting and momentous situation of those nations now agitated with the contest between natural right and arbitrary power :—and where, instead of a free people calmly deciding upon the best mode of governing themselves, we see a combination of monarchs lawlessly imposing upon nations a form of government alike the object of their hatred and contempt ; and where, instead of mutual confidence between subjects and rulers, we behold, on one hand, a standing army, ready, at the command of a tyrannical master, to shed the blood of fathers and brothers to perpetuate their common slavery ; and, on the other, an outraged people, awaiting with breathless anxiety, the decree affecting their liberties and lives, or seeking, in exile or death, a refuge from ignominy and oppression. It is not, however, merely a scene of fear and anxiety ; hope and exultation mingle largely with the feelings excited in contemplating the efforts of humanity striving against tyranny, by the general prevalence of which, the progress of intelligence and freedom is so strongly evinced. And, surely, the cause of liberty, wherever asserted, cannot be an unwelcome theme in celebrating the independence of those, whose fathers first sounded the alarm that is now ringing throughout the world.

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There is a peculiar grandeur in the present aspect of Europe ; the general struggle agitating its inhabitants is not between rival monarchs contending for empire, nor between nation warring against nation, for trifling rights or imaginary wrongs ; the commotions we witness, are those necessarily created by the developement of the mind, attempting to rise from beneath the enormous load of superstition and despotism under which it has been for centuries buried ; we behold the great and glorious contest between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between the general cause of humanity, on one side, and the general cause of usurpation, on the other ;—and who can feel doubtful of the result ?

The reformation, in breaking the fetters of religious despotism, loosened those of political tyranny with which they were entwined, and, thus, gave the first impulse to that spirit of liberty which has recently effected such improvements in most of the European governments. And in the successive triumphs of principle over oppression and gradual compromise of prescriptive privileges and popular rights which mark their history, we behold the safe and certain progress of freedom ; whose advocates, hitherto, too often rushing with heedless impetuosity to overthrow the tyrannical institutions of their country, and leaving none other under which to shelter themselves, have fallen breathless and exhausted victims to a yet sterner power.

The modern system of international law, established since the French revolution, by which the sovereigns of

Europe are leagued together for the mutual defence of their respective prerogatives, and to perpetuate existing institutions by interference in the domestic concerns of nations,—while it proves the advance of reason and of the principles of civil liberty, which renders such a combination necessary, has an immediate tendency to increase the spirit it is designed to crush.—It impressively proclaims to their subjects, that the Holy Alliance is not established for the preservation of national peace only, but to perpetuate domestic tyranny and check the progress of that amelioration of man's condition which it is the spirit of the age to promote : opposition to it is aroused, therefore, not only by hatred of oppression and love of individual liberty, but by every national and patriotic feeling. Let the citizens of those nations realise that their rulers rely upon foreign aid for the support of their authority,—that they hold it, independent of the welfare of their subjects, and not as resting upon their principles and affections, and the foundation of their power is destroyed. Indeed the change, which this despotic league is formed to prevent, has already in great measure taken place ; —the silent progress of knowledge, has been accomplishing a gradual revolution in public sentiment, and awaked mankind to a sense of their dignity and rights ; and never have the friends of humanity had such cause to exult, as is now found in the extended means of education and diffusion of that religion which no people can enjoy in its purity without becoming essentially free.

The tremendous events which have recently convulsed Europe, have renovated principles and feelings which had been too long stifled. The overthrow of governments

and dismemberment of kingdoms ; the annihilation of prescriptive privileges and distinctions, and the facility and indignity with which *divine rights of kings* have been trampled upon by human power, have imparted activity and energy to the mind and given nations a knowledge of their strength ; have dispelled that excessive reverence for ancient institutions by which the most fearful and gloomy usurpations have been so long consecrated and preserved, and excited men to an anxious and bold inquiry into the origin and principles of the authority so cruelly exercised. Even standing armies, the first engines employed by kings and subjects to crush the power of feudal nobles, and afterwards converted by sovereigns into instruments of establishing and perpetuating their own despotism, have now espoused the cause of popular freedom. Men are beginning to feel that their liberties and lives are not the property of a family, nor the right of governing them an indefeasible inheritance. The spirit of liberty is abroad in the world, the fire is kindling upon her altars in every civilized country ; in Italy and Greece she is revisiting the scenes of her former glory ; Spain, by one of the noblest and grandest revolutions the world ever witnessed, has thrown off most of the coils which Despotism and Superstition have been, for three centuries, binding around her ; France has emerged from alternate anarchy, revolution and despotism, to a comparatively free existence ; the States of Germany are filled with enlightened and zealous advocates of the rights of man ; the government of Prussia is shaken to its foundation ; and, even in the armies of Russia, the light is beginning to break forth. The mind has received an impulse which it is too late to resist : the Emperor of Austria may amuse the world by his mandates for the suppression

of learning and dictate a reverence for absurd and antiquated institutions, as if his decree could fetter the soul ; the Holy Alliance may rear its terrific form and unfurl the banners of despotism :—it is in vain,—the cause of freedom is “ the cause of God, and will not be deserted.”

My countrymen, we are not merely spectators of this eventful struggle ; we also, have a great and solemn duty to perform. In us is reposed the high trust of displaying to the world the operation of the principles of enlightened freedom, and, by our failure would the grand question of man’s capacity for self-government be, at least for centuries, decided. The patriots of other countries are looking to us for the confirmation of their principles, and appeal to our Republic as illustrative of the doctrines they advocate ; and if we, whose government has been erected with so much wisdom, labour and suffering, defended with such heroic sacrifices of blood and treasure, and consecrated with such fervent piety and pure morality ; if we, who have been blessed with all of freedom that the most sanguine friend of humanity ever wished ; who ought to be animated by every feeling of national pride, enlightened patriotism and devotional gratitude, and actuated by every interested and every lofty and generous sentiment ; if we shall suffer the institutions of our country to be weakened or destroyed by our negligence or corruption, we shall most miserably fail, not only in our duty to the memory of our fathers, to ourselves and our posterity, but to the whole human race. If our republic fall, well may it be said that man is incapable of self-government ; for none can ever again be raised on deeper

or broader foundations, erected with more care or more securely defended by all that wisdom, virtue and religion can devise. In no nation is the maxim, that all government is founded on opinion, so necessary to be thoroughly understood and extensively known, as in this. In those countries, indeed, where the authority of the rulers depends upon factitious notions of hereditary and divine right, the truth of this doctrine must be cautiously concealed ; for, should their subjects once realise the tenure by which the tyranny they feel is held, they would spurn the authority which now rests only on their ignorance and superstition. With us, power, theoretically and practically, resides in the people ; the periodical return of it into their hands, to be reinvested at their pleasure, places the whole character of our laws and institutions, upon the foundation of their sentiments. The establishment, therefore, which demands our chief and unremitting attention, is that system of public education which was the pride of our fathers, is still the glory of our country, and is essential to the continuance of our national freedom and happiness. This, alone, can perpetuate the grand principle of Political Equality, upon which rests the whole fabric of our government ; for it is in vain that our Constitution proclaims that all men are born free and equal, unless we enable them to continue so, by throwing open, equally to all, the doors to honour and promotion ; and this alone can perpetuate the security and freedom of our republic ; for if the people be ignorant, no form of government, however perfect in its theory or impartially administered, can long remain unshaken. The power of the few will soon be esteemed a usurpation of

the rights of the many, and Political Equality, instead of consisting in the enjoyment of equal rights and privileges, will degenerate into a promiscuous levelling of all, even the most necessary distinctions, till aristocracy or despotism wrest the sceptre from a degraded and enfeebled populace. Let us ever remember that our national freedom was effected, and can alone be maintained, by the moral strength and mental energy of the people ; and let us cherish with anxious solicitude, those literary and religious institutions by which the character of our fathers was formed, and by which only, it can continue the inheritance of their children.

In all ages and countries, knowledge has been the herald and friend of liberty ; in modern Europe her most zealous advocates are found in seminaries of learning ; and in the history of the world, we find that the most devoted martyrs in her cause have been those who felt the physical degradation of despotism least, but whose enlightened minds spurned at its existence, as derogatory to our race.

In this country, we have nothing to fear from the progress of learning ; there is here, no arbitrary power to control her efforts or purchase her praises ; no hereditary rank to be gilded by her honours, perpetuated by hersophistries or vindicated by her eloquence ; our poets will celebrate the achievements of our fathers ; our historians will perpetuate the principles, feelings and manners upon which our republic has been erected ; our statesmen and moralists, unfolding the system of our government, will display the inseparable connection between private morals

and public happiness ; and the refinement of literature, diffused throughout society, will add beauty to the strength and grandeur of national character.

Another institution, which necessarily grew out of the condition of our ancestors and is essential to the preservation of our liberties, is our system of national militia. Those who consider it intended merely for defence against foreign aggression or the suppression of domestic tumults, have reflected little upon its tendency or usefulness ; arguments, however, need not be sought for, to prove that men, periodically accustomed to the use of arms and to habits of military obedience, will be better prepared to constitute an army for national defence than those who had seen weapons only in the hands of a regular soldiery, and considered every exercise of arbitrary authority a violation of their liberties. This military system is, in fact, the theory of our government carried out into actual operation ; that, by which the sovereign power, which the Constitution proclaims to be in the people, is actually placed in their hands ; whereby their rights and liberties are left to be preserved and defended by their own valour and discretion, against domestic as well as foreign usurpation. It is the peculiar armour of a free people, for, unbounded as is our confidence in the patriotism of those who now compose our national troops, history and reason alike demonstrate that no nation can long retain its liberty, in which arms are borne only by a standing army.

I know not, Fellow Citizens, in what terms to speak of the peculiar privileges we enjoy ; the simple enumeration of our political blessings has the appearance of ostenta-

tious exultation. Living under a form of government invisible as the air we breathe, and felt only in the protection it affords ; with Commerce, Agriculture and Manufactures affording full scope to genius and industry, a brave army and a gallant navy ; with a system of literary and religious education, the common property of all classes of the people, diffusing throughout them an enlightened love of freedom and social order : and a military institution, which places the ultimate power in the hands of the people, and throws upon themselves the responsibility of maintaining their liberties ; we seem to be realizing one of those splendid scenes of national grandeur and happiness which had, before, been esteemed the delusive dream of the political enthusiast. Language would fail me, were I to attempt the appeal in behalf of yourselves and posterity which the contemplation of our situation seems to demand :—that you realise these advantages is enough, I trust, to animate you to adhere to those principles, feelings and manners in which they originated, and by which alone, they can be perpetuated to your children.





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